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ABSTRACT

Art education in the community colleges of America is much like art education in the comprehensive four-year colleges and universities, that is, important and enduring, but not central to institutional mission. Many students taking the classes in handicrafts, painting and drawing, design, and graphics intend to make careers in the arts. Others take these classes as college electives. A sizable minority attend for their own personal interest as a way of gaining access to the staff and facilities. A national study conducted by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges involved a survey of students enrolled in arts classes at 78 community colleges and a count of the arts classes offered in 109 randomly selected community colleges. It was found that the curriculum in the arts was still dominated by music and the visual arts, each accounting for 43% of the enrollment. Around 4% of the enrollment in the community colleges in any one term was in the arts. The students reported a high degree of satisfaction with the art courses and, compared with students in other curriculums, much greater gains toward self-confidence, respect for other people, openness toward new ideas, employable skills, and awareness of alternatives in education and work. Whether the state should reimburse the colleges for the students who take art classes repeatedly without making progress toward completing a program is a continuing policy issue. (Author/EJV)

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Abstract

Art education in the community colleges of America is much like art education in the comprehensive four-year colleges and universities: important and enduring but not central to institutional mission. Many students taking the classes in handicrafts, painting and drawing, design, and graphics intend making careers in arts. Others take classes as college electives. A sizable minority attend for their own personal interest as a way of gaining access to the staff and facilities.

In a national survey the students reported a high degree of satisfaction with the art courses and, compared with students in other curriculums, much greater gains toward self-confidence, respect for other people, openness toward new ideas, employable skills, and awareness of alternatives in education and work.

Whether the state should reimburse the colleges for the students who take art classes repeatedly without making progress toward completing a program is a continuing policy issue.

Art Education in Community Colleges

Enrollment in arts classes diminishes as students progress through school. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (1981) estimates that two thirds of all seventh graders are involved in formal arts education , but by the eleventh grade only one in six students is studying art. In the comprehensive four-year colleges and universities the arts are de-emphasized even further. The American College Testing Program and the College Boards do not provide the colleges with entrance tests for ability or interest in the arts; they emphasize verbal and quantitative mastery which in turn predicts college grades. As Dyer noted, "The whole system of secondary and higher education is a closed system from which the arts are, for intents and purposes, excluded." (1968, p. 87). That statement was based on the assumption that what is tested in fact drives the curriculum. The entrance tests certainly do not account for all areas of study but they do reveal the institutions' central tendencies.

Because the community colleges are part of the formal educational system that reaches from kindergarten to the doctorate, their involvement with the arts looks much like that revealed in the other general purpose colleges. The community colleges enroll 4.5 million students, more than one third of all people participating in public higher education. Found in every state, these open-admissions institutions offer freshmen and sophomore classes for students intending to transfer to four-year

colleges and universities, occupational education for those seeking employment skills, and a variety of courses for people attending for their own personal interest. Their students cover the span of academic ability. Half of them are aged 25 or older. Two thirds are employed in their local community and attend college on a part-time basis. The colleges offer classes in art, dance, music, and theatre to professional artists, hobbyists, amateur participants, and college art majors. In rural areas, the community colleges are often the arts centers for the community; their exhibits, recitals, concerts, and performances may represent nearly all of the opportunity for the public to experience or participate in the arts.

Traditional art education has been offered in nearly all community colleges since they were founded in early and mid-century. Thornton (1972) reviewed the catalogs of 40 colleges in the 1960s and found 38 of them offering design, color, drawing, and similar basic subjects. Most of them listed between 10 and 30 different courses. Jansen, (1971) surveyed 102 colleges and found 96 of them offering basic art classes, predominantly drawing or design. But disparate courses do not a program make: Reynolds (1969) reviewed the program descriptions of the community colleges listed in the 1967 national directory and found separate art departments in fewer than three of eight institutions. Art enrollments were greater than music enrollments in three-fourths of them, but program support was modest because of the paucity of art majors and of extramural funds. One in eight colleges offered commercial art. Jansen concluded that general education or distribution requirements

accounted for most of the art enrollments in the colleges he surveyed although lower-division courses carrying credit toward majoring in art were found in half of them. The larger institutions had the greatest variety of class types. In the community colleges, as in all schools that attempt to serve a broad array of people and purposes, enrollments numbering in the thousands are necessary before any subject that is not required for graduation can enroll enough students to warrant separate departmental status.

Survey Procedures

More recent information is provided by a 1987 Ford Foundation-sponsored study of the arts. Conducted by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges, this project involved a survey of students enrolled in arts classes in 78 community colleges and a count of the classes offered in 109 colleges selected at random from the national roster of 1250 public and private community colleges. The procedure was for the Center staff to invite participation by writing to the college president asking for the name of an on-campus facilitator (usually an arts department chairperson). The facilitator sent a spring, 1987, class schedule to the Center. Courses offered were classified according to level and every thirtieth art or music class and every fifteenth dance or theater class that required a prerequisite was selected using a random starting point in each schedule.

After the sample was drawn, a packet was prepared for the campus facilitator at each participating college. Each packet contained a letter of instructions to the facilitator, which

named the class(es) to be surveyed, and an envelope for each class containing the survey instruments, as well as a letter to the instructor explaining the purpose of the survey. The facilitators were asked to contact each instructor and make arrangements to have the surveys completed by the students in class, retrieve the completed surveys, and return the packets to the Center.

To achieve a wide national distribution in the sample of colleges, twelve surveys were mailed to each class selected. The number of survey instruments distributed to each participating college ranged from 12 to 36, or one to three classes surveyed per college. If a class was not offered, or too few students were enrolled, the campus facilitator and class instructor were instructed to distribute the survey instrument to additional students in a comparable class. Since class sections were selected only as a convenience for distributing surveys to a random sample of students in advanced courses in the arts, this method of substitution did not affect the validity of the sample; it helped to ensure a higher response rate. In all, 1344 survey instruments were distributed and 1079 (80 percent) were returned from students in 108 classes. The findings were tabulated and compared with the responses of a 1986 survey of 7558 students in all types of classes in a similar sample of colleges.

Findings

The curriculum in the arts is still dominated by music and the visual arts; each accounts for 43 percent of the enrollment, with theatre taking 8 percent and dance, 6 percent. Within

the visual arts, courses in handicrafts enroll 38 percent of the students; painting and drawing, 32 percent; design, 14 percent; and graphics, 14 percent. The variety of courses in each of the categories suggests the breadth of the curriculum. Handicrafts includes ceramics, sculpture, weaving, photography, jewelry-making, and other crafts. Within graphics are printmaking, relief and intaglio printing, calligraphy, illustration for reproduction, cartooning, advertising design, commercial art, and computer graphics. Sixty-one percent of the classes require a prerequisite in the arts, a considerably higher percentage of advanced classes than for any other curriculum; less than one-fourth of the classes in the humanities or social sciences, for example, are based on prior courses in those fields.

Around four percent of the enrollment in the community colleges in any one term is in the arts. This says nothing about the overall number of matriculants who ever take an art or music class because over a period of several terms any number of students may participate. However, it is likely that around one in six students takes classes in the arts. Most of them come from among the 35 percent of the community college students who intend transferring and from the 15 percent who attend for their own personal interest.

Because the community colleges serve a variety of educational and service functions the place of the arts in their curriculum is indistinct. College-parallel or transfer studies share equal billing with occupational studies. Therefore, in order to sustain institutional support the visual arts must relate to both functions. And indeed much of the emphasis in

painting, drawing, and design is directed toward art majors and potential transfers, just as the handicrafts and graphics classes lean toward the commercial.

The students taking classes in the visual arts are younger on average than the other community college students, although around one fourth of them are aged 35 or older. Nearly 60 percent are majoring in art. Their high school grade point average was a little higher than the student body at large but their estimate of their own abilities in the liberal arts is about the same, with one exception: they feel that compared with other students at the institution they are better able to understand art, music, and drama. Furthermore, they are much more likely to feel that the college has affected them positively. When asked, "How much have your experiences at this college affected you?" the students in art classes were much more likely to say that they were gaining focus and direction, confidence, employable skills, respect and liking for other people, self-awareness and insight, an openness to new ideas and people, an awareness of alternatives in education and work, and a general feeling of being better educated.

In contradistinction to the universities where most of the hobbyists have been relegated to extension divisions, the community colleges serve a sizable cohort of people seeking neither transfer nor occupational studies. Twenty-two percent of the art students responding to the 1987 survey reported that their most important reason for attending college was "To satisfy a personal interest (cultural, social)." That group tended to be older, more likely female, many with college degrees already.

They were using the kilns and printmaking facilities, painting or drawing under the tutelage of an instructor. To use Ivan Illich's term, they were gaining access to tools.

Many of the other students enrolled in classes in the visual arts are planning or are already involved in careers in that field. (See Table 1). Many say they have sold work and a high proportion of all the arts students, 38 percent, anticipate that within five years they will be involved in the arts to the extent of making a career and a significant proportion of their income therefrom. These "career optimists" tend to be younger, more likely male, full-time students, enrolled because of the faculty's reputation and availability, and planning on further study in more specialized programs. They are like the rest of the students in arts classes in their tendency to take classes outside their field. Their estimation of their abilities to understand and create artistic works is much higher. They feel that their college program is helping them achieve their goals.

Should a serious student of the arts enter a community college? The question is moot because few community college students have the luxury of choice. They typically do not select the college instead of a specialized conservatory because of its program but because it is a low-cost, readily accessible institution in which they can enroll regardless of their prior academic or artistic record (See Table 2). Auditions and portfolios are not required. Even so, the curriculum vitae of an impressive number of professional artists show community college study. And the arts faculty in many of the colleges have gained distinction in their own right.

Issues

Certain issues of policy affect the arts in community colleges just as they do in the universities. Should study in the arts be part of the graduation requirements? In most colleges it is not. But fewer than 10 percent of the matriculants obtain associate degrees anyway, therefore imposing an arts class requirement would be more a symbol of institutional commitment than a contributor to enrollment in the arts classes.

A greater policy issue relates to the enrollment of people who seek neither academic degrees nor occupational entry certificates. They find the community college studios well equipped and accessible, the faculty well trained and helpful. Most of the costs are borne by the state under prevailing reimbursement patterns that are arrayed as though all matriculants were degree-bound. Should the state pay for adults taking painting, drawing, and sculpture classes repeatedly? Efforts have been made in some states to limit the number of successive course enrollments. The community colleges in Florida require their students to show steady progress toward a degree. In California students may not receive credit (and the college reimbursement) for the same course more than twice. But in general the practice of providing community education under the umbrella of college-credit courses prevails.

Separate funding sources typically are found to cover the many involvements with the arts that the colleges build in association with local community groups. Harlacher (1969) described several examples of college art galleries supported by a combination of philanthropic foundation, local college, and

private donor funds. Simpson (1982) reported how the community arts program at Black Hawk Community College (Illinois) included art workshops for children and exhibits by local artists. Art exhibits mounted in college galleries were described recently by Hazard (1981), Brown (1982b), Chernow (1983), and Moore (1983). The exhibits often are reviewed in the local press and the galleries sometimes receive acclaim: Brown described the gallery at Cerro Coso Community College (California) as a "tiny pocket of culture hidden in the desert expanses north of Los Angeles (1982a, p. 4)" and Ewing (1982) called the art gallery at Long Beach City College (California) one of the most steadfast in the area. The issue is that without the constant attention of a vigorous internal support group of faculty or administrators, these community involvements wither. There is no consistent funding base for them.

High levels of support for buildings, staff, and equipment are seen where the college leaders favor the arts: Santa Monica College (California), Miami-Dade Community College (Florida), and Mt. Hood Community College (Oregon) afford prominent examples. In Iowa, Nebraska, South Carolina and other states, where the community colleges are perceived more as occupational training institutes, considerably less involvement with the arts can be found. In general, nationwide, arts programs in the larger community colleges are as vibrant as any other curriculum. And in colleges where staff has effected joint arrangements with the state arts council or has brought community support groups together to form local arts councils, the programs are among the most prominent.

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TABLE I

What type of involvement with the arts did you have BEFORE YOU ENROLLED in this college?
(PLEASE MARK **ALL** THAT APPLY)

	Majored in the Arts in School or College	Occasionally Sold Work or Performed as a Professional	Participated as a Hobby for Personal Interest Only	Participated as an Amateur in Community Performances	Career, with Significant Proportion of Income Derived from Arts	Took Private Lessons/ Private Classes	No Involvement
Art	17%	12%	46%	8%	5%	11%	31%
Dance	3	3	21	10	1	13	50
Music	9	10	34	25	3	32	26
Theater/Drama/Film	6	3	20	21	1	5	47

What is your CURRENT involvement in the arts? (PLEASE MARK **ALL** THAT APPLY)

	Majoring in the Arts in School or College	Occasionally Selling Work or Performing as a Professional	Participating as a Hobby for Personal Interest Only	Participating as an Amateur in Community Performances	Career, with Significant Proportion of Income Derived from Arts	Taking Private Lessons/ Private Classes	No Involvement
Art	27%	13%	35%	5%	6%	4%	30%
Dance	4	3	17	6	1	5	54
Music	15	9	32	18	3	20	31
Theater/Drama/Film	7	3	16	11	2	2	52

What type of involvement with the arts do you expect to have FIVE YEARS FROM NOW?
(PLEASE MARK **ONE** RESPONSE FOR **EACH** ROW)

	High Probability	Possible	Not Likely
Will be majoring in the arts in school or college	28%	29%	38%
Will be selling work or performing as a professional occasionally	34	29	32
Will be participating as a hobby for personal interest only	42	33	19
Will be participating as an amateur in performances in the community	20	38	35
Will be taking private lessons or private classes	23	39	32
Will be my career, with significant proportion of income derived from arts	38	22	35
Will be teaching in the arts	17	27	50
No involvement	3	8	74

TABLE 2

How important were the following in your decision to enter THIS college? (MARK ONE RESPONSE IN EACH ROW)

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
The availability of funds	43%	27%	21%
The college is close to my home	46	33	16
The dance program	5	6	75
Dissatisfied with my job	10	13	63
Encouragement or recommendations from others	22	41	27
Faculty who are well-known in the fine and performing arts fields	28	29	32
Lessening of home responsibilities	8	16	64
The music program	22	14	53
Not eligible for admission elsewhere	3	6	77
The studio art program	23	17	49
The theater/drama/film program	11	13	63
To gain the experience needed for later transferring to a special arts program	35	22	33

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